

BLIND BANTER

Hoosier Creek Conservation & Retriever Association Quarterly Newsletter

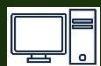
March 2023

Issue 1



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FIRST SHOTS



In a world of texts, tweets, bloggers, and influencers, the Hoosier Creek Conservation and Retriever Association (HCCRA) has found it increasingly important to share updates with our members. Blind Banter, is our new quarterly newsletter which was created with the intent of sharing our message, mission, and efforts in the world of waterfowling, retriever training, and habitat conservation/improvement with our members. Creating this publication was important for us since the members are the driving force behind the success of the organization; we feel it is important to keep you informed of how your involvement, dollars, and efforts have a direct impact on our community. With this newsletter we hope that members see our efforts to promote waterfowl, local habitat improvement, community youth, and our retrieving companions through pictures, stories, and projects that will be discussed in Blind Banter issues throughout the upcoming years.

HCCRA Group Summary

Though receiving this newsletter means you've been affiliated with HCCRA in one way or another, you may not be familiar with the history, goals, or motivation of the organization. In 2017, HCCRA was founded with the merger of the Eastern Iowa Hunting and Retriever Association (founded in 1987) and the Hoosier Bay Delta Waterfowl Chapter (founded in 2012).

We are a not-for-profit 501(c)(3) and our primary goal is to benefit waterfowl, habitat, retrievers, youth, and our communities by investing locally raised money into local projects.



By keeping the local funding within our region with projects that are planned, designed, constructed, and executed by HCCRA members ensures that east central Iowa benefits from the time, effort, and money put forth by HCCRA members. Examples of the local efforts are shown through the HCCRA annual youth hunt where members take local youth on a waterfowl hunt,

teaching valuable skills in the field. Similarly, wood duck boxes and hen houses have been purchased, installed and maintained in our local wetlands. Additionally, conservation projects such as Atherton Wetlands and Tick Pond are improvements for habitat and hunting opportunities through the design and construction from HCCRA members. Also, a large focus on retriever training and hunt tests assists local hunters with dog handling skills. Lastly, a byproduct of meeting these common conservation goals is creating lifelong relationships with like-minded stewards of the land and advocates for waterfowl, which creates an even greater reward from HCCRA involvement.

Blind Banter Forum

Have a question for the HCCRA committee members about waterfowl hunting, dog training, upcoming/past events, or project details? Have a comment or question about a past newsletter article? Send us your thoughts at hccra18@gmail.com to get an answer in our next newsletter!

Young Hunter Feature

Are you 18 years old or younger and have a hunting, retriever training, or conservation story to tell? Are you a youth that learned something afield that you would like to share with the HCCRA community? Send your stories or articles over to hccra18@gmail.com for a chance to be featured in the next newsletter!

2023 HCCRA Banquet



Finally! The 2023 Banquet is here! Thank you so much for joining us once again; we have loads of games, raffle prizes, auction items, and of course....GUNS. As you take a quick glance across the banquet hall you will notice a wide array of games around the perimeter ranging from a putting game to a target shooting game, to Texas Rig pull, to Plinko, and many more. Tables displaying over 30 guns to be won throughout the banquet are scattered around the room. A youth raffle table has been mounded with prizes to be given away to young/future duck hunters. A lady's raffle table has been loaded with prizes to be given away to the huntresses in the crowd. A wheelbarrow heaping with liquor is ready to leave with its rightful raffle winner. Hand-carved wooden duck decoys, waterfowl décor, a unique hunting opportunity, and much more will be included on the auction lineup. While it may be easy to get caught up in the fun and activities or the outstanding meal by Billy's Chicken Shack, the purpose behind the annual banquet is pivotal in driving the conservation efforts throughout the upcoming year. We hope to exceed \$30,000 in net proceeds this year!

Those funds are being directed towards local conservation efforts with projects like the Tick Pond Restoration that is in the works. With the rising cost of materials, fuel, and all other expenses, this fundraising night is becoming even more crucial to the success of HCCRA. Not only are the dollars of the members providing them with a night of entertainment and a chance at winning amazing prizes, but it is improving habitat and waterfowl hunting in right here in east central Iowa. Youth duck hunts, retriever training events, state duck calling contests, and wood duck box installation are all events and activities that would not occur without the time, effort, and money of the HCCRA members.



'22 Calling Contest

On September 17, 2022 the HCCRA, along with Championship caller Rob Bevins, hosted a Calling Contest and Outdoor Expo at the Amana RV Park and Event Center. The HCCRA had a great turn-out for our first annual event. The longtime state competition was formerly hosted by Mississippi Valley Callers Association and we felt that this important tradition should continue. Youth Calling Competitions (10 and under; and 11-17 age divisions), Novice Mainstreet Calling Competition, the Iowa State Championship Calling Competition, and the Hunter Memorial Regional Calling Competition were held. A gun raffle, vendors, dog retriever demonstration, and a food truck were also well received by the patrons.

JJ Moser won the Iowa State Championship Calling Contest, while Nick Brichacek took first in the Regional Calling Contest and qualified for the World Championship at the Wings Over the Prairie Festival in Stuttgart Arkansas.

Nesting Project



On the crisp morning of February 4th, 2023 over twenty HCCRA members and volunteers gathered bright and early to discuss plans and delegate responsibilities for the annual nesting project day. 46 new DuckHut Wood Duck Boxes were installed on marshes throughout east central Iowa, including Atherton Wetlands, Lake McBride, Coralville Reservoir, Wakpicada Natural Area and other locations in Johnson and Linn Counties. These nesting structures are critical in the successful nesting and hatching of Wood Ducks in Iowa, providing security from predators and natural weather events. In addition, HCCRA members also cleaned out previously installed boxes, replaced bedding, and recorded utilization of the nesting structures. This project is led by HCCRA Conservation Chair Eric Harris, who has managed the program and utilization data since 2015.

“Seeing the physical impacts of wood duck production right in our neck of the woods just goes to show how important these local conservation projects are. The ability to quantify the positive impacts that the HCCRA has made on local wood duck production shows that the money and time that members dedicate to the group directly leads to improved waterfowl numbers...something that we hope improve for many years to come.” – Eric Harris

Since 2013, HCCRA has installed over 200 Wood Duck boxes and 15 hen houses locally. Wood duck house utilization rates have been as high as 67%. For the 2022 nesting season, box utilization was a bit below the 2021 mark of 58%, but total estimated eggs laid (407 and 428 respectively) was consistent. These results show that member involvement is directly resulting in more ducks in the sky.

Locations for these nest structures are meticulously planned to ensure the location is in an area of specific habitat with an abundance of food and water for the nesting hens to have adequate nourishment while on the nest.



The boxes also provide protection from predators ranging from coyotes, fox, racoon, skunk, mink, possum, crows, hawks, eagles, and other predators. We have also had human ‘predators’ damage boxes by shooting them, which is very unfortunate.

Also, since we target high use/probable habitat areas near water, our boxes have been impacted / lost to flooding or ice flow. Some of our early wood boxes deployed in 2015-2017 have already rotted away and as such, we have transitioned to using DuckHut units. We typically see better success with the DuckHut units vs. wood; plus the DuckHut units look nice and are very easy to maintain/check, but they are quite expensive.

Big thanks to DuckHut, Paulsen Electric and the Hess Family for their contributions to the program.

2022 Duck Production Data

# Boxes Used	54
# Boxes Not Used	44
2022 box utilization:	55%
All Boxes Out by Club over years	200+
# of Available Boxes for 2023 Nesting:	156+
# of Checked Boxes in 2023:	111
# of Unchecked Boxes in 2023:	10
#of Boxes yet to be Installed in 2023:	8
# of New Boxes Installed 2023:	46

Nesting Project Success



A newly installed DuckHut Wood Duck Box



A successful Wood Duck hatch



Some of HCCRA's youngest members working on a hen house



A nest with a surprise abandoned bee hive



A lineup of DuckHuts to be installed

Off-season To-Do List



The offseason blues are here and in full-effect. It's been over two months since the Iowa Honker season closed, causing the annual duck depression to set in. Knowing there is another 6 months remaining before the excitement of the opener begins isn't for the faint of heart. Granted there are Snow Geese flying up the Midwest in waves, and the sounds of gobbling Spring Turkeys are on the horizon, but it isn't quite the same as seeing flocks of waterfowl rolling in on a stiff north autumn breeze. Fortunately, there are plenty of off-season activities and task list items that can be completed to make us feel like we are still in the midst of the waterfowling world. It's also best to complete these tasks in the offseason rather than when we find ourselves hustling for final preparations as the seasons' start nears. Here are some reminders, tasks, and activities from the HCCRA committee to keep your mind on waterfowl this offseason...

"Take your calls with you on car rides and practice on the way, it's easy to do to keep your skills sharp, no one likes hunting with a bad caller." – Adam Roeder

"Don't forget about the dogs! Having a skilled retriever doesn't mean waiting until late August to take the dog for some bumper retrieves. It's an all-year effort not only to keep the retriever sharp, but keep yourself sharp as a handler. Take the free time in the offseason to work on evolving the skills of you and your dog."

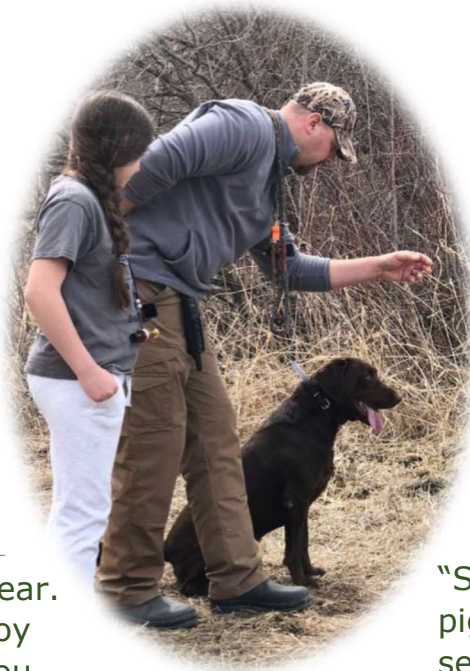
– Dake Dietrick

"Go through and organize your gear. Remember all of the tangled decoy lines and miss-matched gloves you had at the end of the season? Best to take care of that now before September rolls back around."

– Zach French

"Don't stop making connections and building bridges. Talk to land owners during the offseason to maintain relationships and not only seem like you care when the season rolls around."

– Eric Steffes



"Take your guns out of the safe and give them a good clean before they sit for potentially several months. A lot of us put our gun in the safe with the intention of getting out 'one more time' and it never happened. It's good get the gunpowder, oil, and moisture off before any rust starts to set in."

– Mark Groth

"Shoot some clay pigeons, real pigeons, crows, whatever is in season with wings. It's amazing how rusty 9 months of no wingshooting can make a hunter."

– Chad Groth

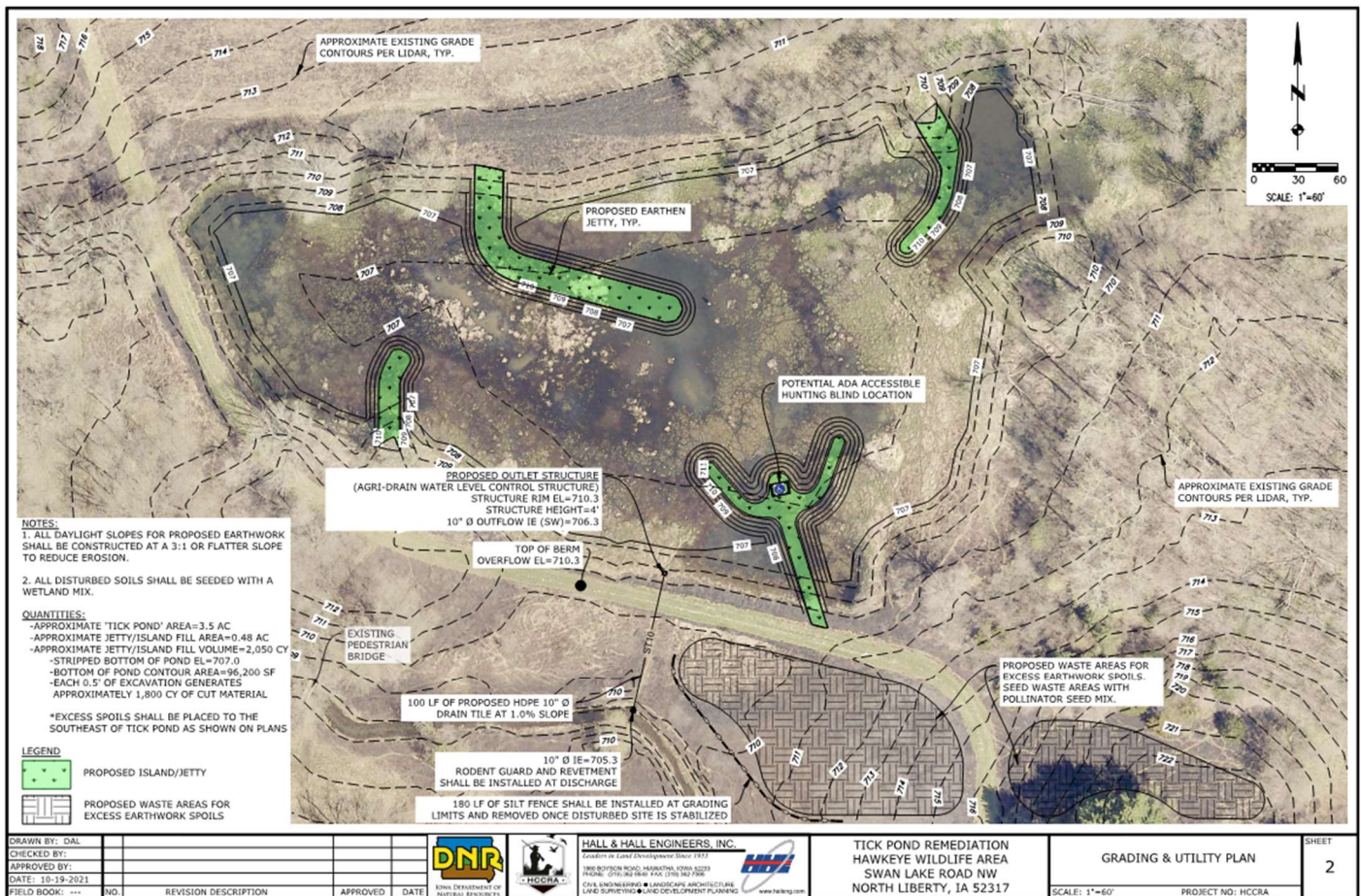
"Go to your hunting spots and clean the place up. Shotgun shells, pop cans, trash. Even if it's not ours, it's our jobs as hunters to be stewards of the land and leave it in a better spot than we left it."

– Jeremy Stolba

Tick Pond Update



Many of the 2022 HCCRA Banquet attendees may recall a presentation regarding the proposed Tick Pond restoration project located within the dog training area of the Hawkeye Wildlife Management Area. The Tick Pond Restoration Project is the next significant project that HCCRA will be undertaking in conjunction with the Iowa DNR who manages and maintains the land, and the Army Corp of Engineers who owns the land. The scope of the project includes restoring and improving the 3.5 acre silted and overgrown wetland impoundment, that has become entirely constricted with invasive plant species, limiting the amount of surface water and useable area for wildlife, hunters, and retrievers. HCCRA has proposed to dredge out the existing wetland to remove the vegetative layer and seed bed to eliminate invasive species and restore water storage volume to more near the historic levels. Additionally, a new outlet control structure is proposed to allow for controlled water depth fluctuation to assist in vegetation planting and site maintenance. Another significant feature of the project is the construction of jetties to provide additional wildlife habitat and improved retriever opportunities. We are currently working with the USACE to develop a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to allow for the collaboration between HCCRA and the US Government on all of our projects. Additionally, we need to collaborate and submit various permits, documents, and approvals (i.e. wetland delineation, cultural resources survey, etc.) prior to construction. Due to the timeline of these processes, the start date is unknown; however, we did start the delineation last fall, but due to dry conditions we postponed that survey to spring 2023. The money raised through the fundraising efforts of HCCRA is directly invested into projects such as Tick Pond to improve wetlands and habitat in the east central Iowa area. If you are interested in donating equipment, manpower, or materials for the project, please let us know!





Retriever Training and Testing

As the snow begins to melt and the temperatures warm, HCCRA is preparing for the upcoming 2023 HCCRA Retriever training and hunt test season. Training days are a great opportunity for both inexperienced handlers and retrievers to learn retrieving skills in an incredibly open and welcoming format, as well as experienced handlers and retrievers to sharpen skills and spend time in simulated situations. All are welcome to participate or observe. Upcoming training days and hunt tests are scheduled as follows:

Training Days:

- April 21st, 2023 8:00 AM at Hawkeye Wildlife Area

Hunt Tests: (at Hawkeye Wildlife Area)



May 6 and 7, 2023



May 20 and 21, 2023



Hunt Test volunteers are needed!!!

Creeker's Kitchen

Creeker's Kitchen is devoted towards the culinary art of waterfowl, and providing the HCCRA community with a diverse range of recipes to try with their harvested birds. If you have a favorite recipe, feel free to email it to us for a chance to be featured in the next issue.

This Quarter's Recipe: **Country Fried Fowl**

Ingredients:

- 2 Large Eggs
- 3 Cups of Whole Milk
- 1 Tablespoon of Cayenne Pepper
- 1 Tablespoon of Crushed Red Pepper
- 1.75 Cups of Flour
- 1 Cup Vegetable Oil
- 8 Duck Breasts
- 3 Tablespoons of Butter
- 2 Tablespoons of Cajun Seasoning

Process:

- Tenderize duck breasts with meat mallet until approximately 1/2" thick
- Pour 1 Cup Vegetable Oil into medium sized pan on medium heat
- Mix 2 Large Eggs, 1 Cup of Whole Milk, 1 Tbsp Each of Cayenne and Crushed Red Pepper, and 1.5 Cups of Flour until proportioned equally
- Coat duck breasts in mixture until covered
- Place breasts in pan to fry for 6-8 minutes or until golden brown
- Remove Breasts and let cool for 5 minutes.
- While cooling, create country gravy by mixing 2 Cups of Whole Milk, 0.25 Cups of Flour, 3 Tbsp of melted Butter, and 2 Tbsp of Cajun Seasoning in a pot on medium heat and cook until desired thickness is achieved (rolling boil). Stir until the gravy is clump-free.



Honorary Blind Seat



When we think about waterfowl hunting, the lifestyle we all love, we often think about decoying mallards, the smell of gunpowder, watching the sunrise over a spread of diver decoys, or the piercing sound of a goose call. While all of these thoughts and moments are major contributors in why we love the world of waterfowl hunting, we might not always immediately think of one of the largest components...the people. We all have one or several individuals in our life that provided mentorship, companionship, and fellowship in our waterfowl experiences. Perhaps they are your current hunting buddy or maybe a grandfather that took you on your first duck hunt. We all know someone that has made a profound impact on us as individuals, and also on the quality of waterfowl and waterfowl hunting itself. This section is dedicated to highlighting specific individuals who have improved waterfowl hunting and have left a lasting legacy on the waterfowl community. This quarter's Honorary Blind Seat is reserved for:

Dean Downer

Dean Downer epitomizes what the essence of a true waterfowler and outdoorsman *should be*. To Dean, success isn't measured in limits of ducks, its measured in relationships, impacts, influences, and lessons learned from the field. Dean resides in Massena, Iowa and has been a great friend and mentor to several of the HCCRA Committee members for many years. The impact Dean has had on the waterfowl world and his community is quite remarkable.

An avid outdoorsman, Dean has been a passionate waterfowler for the greater part of his life, and he has made it his life mission to promote and assist local youth with being immersed into the outdoors and absorbing the life skills that accompany it. Dean is a former woodworking teacher at Newell Community Schools, where students would learn the trade and even lathe duck calls under the guidance of Dean Downer, also the owner of 'Double D' Calls. He devoted his teaching career to developing the skills and characters of his students. Dean's impact on area youth extends far past the classroom though. The Downer family has a recreational property near Messena where he works with local youth and FFA/4H organizations to develop the land into a wildlife sanctuary full of vegetation and environmental practices, teaching youth how to be stewards of the land and understand how vital ecosystems such as wetlands are necessary to our existence. Dean hosts recreation days at this property that local youth can attend to fish and explore the property. Retriever training has also been a focal point of Dean Downer, and has had many dogs that have ruled the Field Trials. The impact of Dean Downer will be everlasting in the outdoor community due to the hundreds of area youth that he has mentored and influenced to be future conservationists. Dean has quite literally shown that waterfowling is a lifestyle, not a hobby, as he revolves his life around the many facets that waterfowl hunting involves. The waterfowl world is a far better place because of Dean's immeasurable contributions.



Sponsor/Donor Appreciation



This page is dedicated to show our appreciation of our 2023 Sponsors and Donors. HCCRA wouldn't have the ability to impact habitat, waterfowl, and the community the way it has since 2017 without your time, effort, and contributions.

HCCRA Thanks You!

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If interested in being a sponsor/donor for 2024, please reach out to HCCRA at hccra18@gmail.com

We would also like to thank our awesome Auctioneer Justin Hegtvedt for his help!

Thanks to Devin Lawson for his efforts on this publication.